

1 Corinthians 13 (4-7) pt.3 – Love is Kind

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul uses 15 words to describe love as if love were a person. And love is a person, because Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the love of God. In English these 15 words look like nouns or adjectives, but in Greek they are verbs. These words describe love in action, and the godly love that Jesus demonstrated in his life. And everything that these verses say about love is characteristic of the person and work of Christ. These aren't abstract or philosophical ideas about love, and they aren't just describing a feeling that you have in your heart. This is talking about something you do. Love is more than an emotion. You could say that love is as love does.

In this sermon series we are examining each of these 15 manifestations of love. And it is wonderful to see what the true beauty of biblical love looks like. However, understanding what love looks like should convict you of your sin, because this looks like Jesus, but it doesn't look like you. But the beauty of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has met the standard of love for you. And that should inspire you to become more like him as an ongoing act of worship with your life. You see Jesus, and his love for you, and then the Holy Spirit can and does empower you to love like Jesus does.

Remember that forgiveness is the basis of fruitfulness. And the deeper your understanding of God's love for you, the deeper your love for others will be. So, as you think about each of these virtues, prayerfully do this. 1) Acknowledge the standard. 2) Confess how you don't meet the standard. Be specific. 3) Thank Jesus for meeting the standard for you. Praise his name. 4) Strive after the standard of Jesus as an act of worship. Not as a *means* of being right with God, but as the *result* of being right with God. Then, be ready for the tests to come and the fruit to form.

In our last message we talked about how love is patient, and how this might better be understood as longsuffering. We discovered that longsuffering is about your relationships with people. It is the ability to be wronged, and while having the power to retaliate, doesn't do it. Today, we will examine the second of these 15 virtues, and describe how kindness is a vital facet of love.

Love is...*kind*. What do you think of when you hear that word, "kind"? Perhaps you think of gentleness, graciousness, or tenderness. You might talk about kindness to animals, showing kindness to strangers, sharing something with someone, bearing a burden, or something like that. Maybe you think of someone being merciful. I think most people would consider helping those in need or those who are hurting to be acts of kindness. I think of people who are employed or involved in the medical field, doctors, nurses, and others, counselors, children's workers, or any number of helping and healing professions or volunteer activities. I imagine that many pursued those lines of work or service because of a kind heart and a desire to help people. And I would agree that all of those things are expressions of kindness, and I think they are included in what Paul is saying here. But what Paul is saying here is something even more than these things.

Kindness is the flipside to the same coin as longsuffering. Kindness is part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, revealing the close connection between love and kindness, and it marks the Spirit's presence in your life. But kindness goes beyond patience and reaches higher. Kindness is doing good to someone else, and when coupled with patience, you see that kindness means doing something good to someone who hasn't done good to you. In fact, it is doing something good to someone who has done you wrong. Are you convicted yet? Let me convince you some more.

The 1 Corinthians 13 sort of kindness soars high and above what most people think of as kindness. First of all, your salvation can be understood as God's kindness to you in Jesus Christ. Titus 3:3-7 – *For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

God's kindness to you will be expressed eternally. Ephesians 2:7 says *that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* And Paul seems to have coined a new word here in 1 Corinthians 13:4, because he takes a Greek word and sort of adds to it. This is the first time the word was used in ancient literature, and this verse is the only place in the Bible you find it. The point is that the Holy Spirit wanted to indicate something more than a feeling, and more than actions towards those you already have an affection for. Love shows kindness. And it is a kindness that extends even to those that don't deserve it.

Kindness is active, useful, good deeds and availability. Kindness doesn't avoid people, it engages people, problem people, angry people, bitter people, lazy people, ungrateful people, toxic people. You know, the kind of people you struggle to forgive, the kind of people you'd rather forget. You have to be kind to that kind of people. As Ephesians 4:32 says – *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

To express love means that longsuffering patience must be accompanied by goodness toward the other person. But kindness doesn't mean that you give them everything they want. It doesn't mean that you do everything they need. It doesn't mean there are no consequences to their actions. Sometimes love must be tough. Kindness means to withhold what harms, as well as give what heals. Kindness may mean you don't give someone money to bail them out. It may mean allowing someone to fail so that they will turn themselves around. Kindness may mean saying no. Kindness may mean reporting a crime committed by a friend. Kindness might have to tell someone something they don't want to hear. For example, Psalm 141:5 says, *“Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it.”*

Kindness puts the positive action to the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12). If someone had the power to hurt you, you would want them to show you mercy. If someone had the power to heal you, you would want them to show you grace. If someone did you wrong, patience would be like showing mercy (in other words, not giving them what they deserve). Kindness would be like giving grace (in other words, giving them what they don't deserve). This is the way Jesus is with you.

You aren't supposed to destroy people (that's patience) but you aren't supposed to dismiss them either (that's kindness). You might think you're practicing love by simply not hurting the one who has hurt you, in other words, by having patience with them. But if you truly practice love, then you must also help them, this is kindness. Love doesn't strike back, but it does reach out. It is *not* harmful and it *is* helpful. You might think that if you just exercise restraint, and you don't retaliate, that this makes you a good person. Well, having patience with people, and not striking back are good things. But Jesus is pointing to something far greater here.

Turn to Matthew 5:38-48, and I'll read it. When you see this, you get an idea of what lovingkindness is all about. But people are very reserved about fulfilling these commands of our Lord because they wonder what would really happen if they kept them. Would you always be beaten, bare, burdened, and broke? No, and Jesus isn't saying you should put yourself in harms' way. He isn't saying that you should let people hurt you. He is saying that you shouldn't let hurtful people harm your holiness. They may show you unkindness, but you can show them kindness.

Kindness is living your life to benefit others. More than that, it is doing something good to the one who has done bad to you. We have all seen and been involved with kindness shown in strength. Everybody thinks they would be kind if they had extra to share. But what about kindness in weakness? Or what's more, how about kindness when opposed?

Kindness is a manifestation of love. The opposite of love is hatred. And the opposite of kindness, which is not just cruelty, but indifference, and avoidance is, at its core, a manifestation of hatred. There is more hatred in your heart than you think there is. Lovingkindness goes out of its way to help someone. Cruel hatred goes out of its way to avoid someone. Cruel hatred says it's not my problem. Lovingkindness says that I am my brother's keeper.

When Jesus said, "Love your enemies," he wasn't saying, "Feel good about your enemies." He was saying, "Do good things for your enemies." And Jesus didn't say that when you do this your enemies will magically turn into your friends. He is saying is that when you do this you prove that you are his disciple. And you deepen your communion with him.

You say preacher, you are holding up an impossible standard. No one could possibly do this. To which I say yes! That's the point! The covenantal love of God, whereby he saved your soul and will keep you forever is impossible to reach on your own power. But that's what makes the gospel of the lovingkindness of God such an amazing grace. Don't neglect so great a salvation.

This is why some people know about God, and believe in God, but they have never really felt the glory of God. You need to look at the standard and measure yourself honestly. Then you need to look at Jesus and humbly bow to him in faith. If you don't see how wretched you are compared to God, then you'll never feel the glorious grace of the gospel. When you don't realize how high the standard of God actually is, and how miserably you fail to meet that standard, and what an offense your depravity is in the holy sight of God, you can feel nothing in response to the atoning death of the son of God. That's the power of the gospel. It's both sides of the coin. You see how impossible the standard is. But then you see Jesus meeting that impossible standard for you. And then you follow him and he begins to do the impossible through you. When you see the changes in your life that only God can do, then you know that God is true. That's the way it is with God. You see the impossible, then you believe in the impossible, and then you begin to do the impossible.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 looks like Jesus, and it doesn't look like you. But Jesus Christ has met the standard of love for you, because he loves you. When you see the depths of your depravity compared to the heights of his holiness, then you see the measure of his love. And the deeper your understanding of God's love for you, the deeper your love for others will be. And the more you will be inspired and empowered to love like Jesus does. Not as a *means* of being right with God, but as the *result* of being right with God. That's the lovingkindness of our God. Amen.